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AUTHOR Ben-Barka, Alba C.
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ABSTRACT

An approach to second language teaching is proposed that integrates elements of the grammatical and functional-notional syllabus designs. The resulting combination is a communicative framework for functional practice in language learning and teaching. The current status of language teaching is examined in the context of these two instructional approaches. The two strategies are outlined and compared through a review of the literature, and a framework is proposed that uses the design of the functional-notional syllabus and course content determined by the students' communicative needs and interests. Teacher introspection, observation, continuous student feedback, an initial survey, and consensus of opinion during classwork are to serve as guides to establishing the learners' goals and purposes. Essential characteristics of the learner, teacher, syllabus, and classroom environment are discussed. (MSE)

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IN SEARCH OF A LANGUAGE TEACHING FRAMEWORK: AN ADAPTATION OF A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO FUNCTIONAL PRACTICE

Alba C. Ben-Barka

University of Maryland

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Introduction

There is a growing need for an integrated approach to communicative behavior, and to language learning and teaching. While the grammatical and the functional-notional syllabus designs each provide a useful approach, the combination of the valid and adequate parts of each approach is not readily available. Moreover, in view of the inadequacies inherent in both organizations (Brumfit, 1980), and considering the evidence that different people learn in different ways, the need for flexibility and adaptation becomes evident. It may be important, therefore, for the language teacher to develop a framework to suit the communicative and functional needs of the learners within realistic societal contexts.

The general scope of this paper is to examine the current status of language teaching, especially in relation to grammatical and functional/notional syllabus designs. A major objective is to propose a communicative framework for functional practice in language learning and teaching. Specifically, the paper presents: 1) an historical overview; 2) communicative language teaching; 3) a comparison of the functional/notional syllabus with the grammatical syllabus; 4) a description of the functional/notional syllabus; and 5) a communicative framework for functional practice.

Historical Overview

The ambivalence or contrastive thinking reflected in much of the current literature on language learning and teaching can be traced back to approximately 400 B.C. Two thousand years of linguistic concerns may be summarized with the following highlights: the Platonian (prescriptive) - Aristotelian (descriptive) debate; the De Saussurian form/content posture; the Bloomfieldian audio-lingual approach built around Skinnerian principles; Charles Fries' structuralist influence; the Chomskyan elaboration of context-free linguistic rules accounting for uniform and homogeneous linguistic behavior; the Fillmorian semantical outlook on word relationships; J.R. Firth's stress on the context of the situation; Goodenough's emphasis on the social appropriateness of linguistic behavior; Gumperz's acknowledgement of signalling conventions shared by speakers of different languages; Fishman's value on the sociology of language; the cognitive linguist's focus on communication; Hymesian communicative competence, and a communicative approach to foreign language teaching.

At this point, as a person who learns from history, I ask myself these questions: Where has this two-century

old search led language professionals? Is today's language teacher not groping with 400 B.C. concepts of function, content, and accuracy? In all this time, has the language teacher found a balance among these three elements? Yes and No. The above bird's-eye view of past and current language concerns clearly indicates variety among the notions which have entertained the language profession for a long time.

Lack of unified theory and diversified language practice appear to be the hallmarks of present times. The literature, however, does indicate that foreign/second language teachers have turned their attention slightly away from form (e.g., component parts of grammar; emphases on errors and accuracy; teacher-centered classrooms) toward a more global communicative behavior (e.g., discourse; the notions of the learner; individualization; de-emphasis on errors; social interaction; student-centered classrooms; communicative competence).

Communicative competence, the latest "in" concept, constitutes a highly desirable goal in today's society. However, the increased attention to appropriate vocabulary choice, the growing concern for increased facility and fluency in a student's syntactic and semantic choices,

a desire for creativity as well as additional sophistication required in intercultural communication, render a genuine communicative function of language difficult to attain, especially for second language (L_2) learners. Traditional, grammar-based instruction appears not to have provided L_2 learners with sufficient opportunities to engage in authentic communication. A pervasive dissatisfaction over students' lack of communicative competence has encouraged language professionals to seek alternative approaches to language teaching, particularly with regard to curricular designs.

Communicative Language Teaching

In the past, approaches toward language and language teaching predominantly emphasized grammar structure. Very little attention was given to socio-psychological factors, the context of communication, language functions, and learner notions. Since the '70s, attention has focused upon functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more complete communicative view of language teaching. Therefore, the goal of foreign/second language learning has become not only the what (linguistic forms), but also the how, when, where, and why of communication (the appropriate use coupled with the learner's expressive needs). Knowledge

of grammar per se will not do. In Widdowson's (1978) words, "...knowledge of correct usage is of little utility on its own; it has to be complemented by a knowledge of appropriate use" (p. 18). Widdowson's message was summarized by Tarone (1980) in the following way:

> ...traditional foreign language classes have focused too greatly on the grammatical structures of language rather than the day-to-day functions of language (on sentences as opposed to discourse) and on usage (formal correctness) at the expense of use (the ability to successfully communicate in the language). In short, we have asked students to learn facts about some elements of language structure, and then expected them to automatically know how to use the language in communicative situations, eventhough we have not provided the data they need to be able to do this (p. 522).

Widdowson's concern for discourse and the importance he placed on fostering appropriate language usage are germane to the concept of communicative competence generated by Dell Hymes (1972). However, Hymes's notion comprised four sectors: the speaker-hearer's grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and de facto (actually occurring) knowledge and ability for use (Mumby, 1978, p. 15). The grammatical sector, as envisioned by Hymes, is only a part of the whole communication. A syllabus which is based on only one sector, i.e., a grammar-based syllabus, consequently must present some serious limitations.

Further failings of the grammatical approach may be perceived when the language teacher considers the intricacy of the communicative situation, especially within the complex context of foreign language instruction. The following diagram of the communicative situation, which can be with or without speech, may serve to illustrate its complex hierarchical organization:

Communicative Situation

"Speech" Event

Constituent Factors	Functions of Speech
1) sender	1) expressive
2) receiver	2) directive
3) message	3) poetic
4) channel	4) contact
5) code	5) metalinguistic
6) topic	6) referential
7) setting	7) contextual

"Speech" Act

Other major variables in the foreign language instructional setting include: learner characteristics; exposure to the target language (TL); social dominance of the TL and/or learner; motivational factors; learner strategies; educational objectives; methodology; teacher characteristics; instructional materials; and linguistic and cultural elements. According to Littlewood (1981),

> The most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always the person who is best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and his hearer, taking account of what knowledge is already shared between them (e.g., from the situation or from the preceding conversation), and selecting items which will communicate his message effectively. Foreign language learners need opportunities to develop these skills, by being exposed to situations where the emphasis is on using their available resources for communicating meanings as efficiently and economically as possible (p. 4).

Since the traditional grammar-oriented foreign language classroom appears not to have provided sufficient communicative practice, it is no wonder that a growing number of teachers is willing to sacrifice some grammatical accuracy in favor of immediate communicative effectiveness. Supporting this point of view, Stratton (1977), questioned the effectiveness of the communicative syllabus for all situations:

> What seems clear at this point, then, is that communicative competence should be taught and that a structural/situational syllabus only caters for it in an ad hoc manner. The communicative syllabus seems to be the answer, but can an effective one be produced and if so, will it be appropriate for any or all foreign and second language learning situations? (p. 135)

In the end, whether or not teachers subscribe to a communicative approach should not prevent them from realizing its implications on curricular design. For it does suggest an alternative basis for selecting and organizing

the language items to be taught (Littlewood, 1981, VIII). The functional/notional syllabus has been proposed by the Council of Europe as a viable alternative to organizing curricula.

As described by Wilkins (1976), this syllabus promotes organizing teaching methodology and materials by categories that describe various kinds of interactions. How viable is this approach? Does the functional/notional syllabus merely replace the traditional grammar syllabus with just another set of structures to be taught and learned? To these questions, Brumfit (1980) replied that the functional/notional apporach is a replacement and a negative one at that. My own reply is that each teacher must decide for himself/herself whether and how this curricular design would be appropriate in his/her teaching context. A closer look at the functional/notional syllabus compared to the grammatical syllabus might be helpful at this point.

The Functional/Notional Syllabus vs. the Grammatical Syllabus

Concerned with the pedagogical soundness of these two syllabi, Harlow, Smith, and Garfinkel (1980) examined the major aspects of the two approaches and how they relate to learner needs. The main points discussed by the authors can be represented graphically as follows:

Grammatical Syllabus	Functional/Notional Syllabus
1. It is based on the analysis of the linguistic components of language performance (gram. & situational factors)	1. It is based on the communicative use of language.
2. It emphasizes discrete grammar points.	2. It emphasizes the application of grammar components in the larger context of meaning.
3. It focuses on form.	3. It focuses on contextualized activity, i.e., on content in context.
4. The traditional structure is based on complexity of language and similarity to native language.	4. It is structured around learner needs (notions and functions).
5. It promotes linear teaching (active mastery at one time).	5. It promotes cyclical teaching--clusters are practiced one by one in a systematic and progressive way.
6. There is relatively little reinforcement.	6. There is much reinforcement.
7. Analysis and re-synthesis represent the processes emphasized.	7. The emphasis is placed on the analysis of clusters of conventional undifferentiated features of language and register.
8. It assumes an eventual natural acquisition of essential communicative functions of language.	8. The learner is exposed to the actual language of everyday life across a wide range of situations.
9. The structured classroom language resulting from this approach is a poor imitation of real language (i.e., it is repetitive, artificial, or formulaic).	9. Real language of society is used in the classroom (i.e., "spontaneous speech which derives naturally regardless of time or circumstance", p. 12).

Grammatical Syllabus	Functional/Notional Syllabus
10. There is a restricted use of the target language.	10. The target language is used from initial instruction.
11. Learning objectives are imposed upon the student.	11. The student is given the opportunity for participation in the selection of his/her own learning objectives.

The communicative scope as well as the emphasis on meeting student needs render the functional/notional syllabus more attractive to some, than the grammatical syllabus, at least conceptually. However, it may also be true that both approaches may have inherent inadequacies (e.g., rigid-structure); that notions and functions would be even more difficult to specify, describe, systematize, and generalize from than syntactic structures have been, even if the necessary linguistic facts were known (Brumfit, 1980).

The Functional/Notional Syllabus

How does the functional/notional syllabus differ from other syllabi? It differs mainly in its: focus; basis for selecting and ordering materials; and classroom presentation.

Focus

Drawing heavily on semantic theory and the study of speech acts, this approach attempts to tie together the semantic, sociocultural, and linguistic elements of communication for pedagogical purposes (Guntermann and Phillips, 1982, p. 5). Students' needs are met primarily by providing them with options for expressing these meanings through notions (e.g., time and time relations; space) and functions (e.g., asking for reconciliation; sharing satisfaction). In Wilkins' (1976) words, "The whole basis of a notional approach to language teaching derives from the conviction that what people want to do through language is more important than mastery of the language as an unapplied system" (p. 42).

The assessment of the communicative needs of the students is one of the first steps of planning a functional/notional syllabus, Canale and Swain (1979) suggested the following criteria in setting priorities for functions to be taught: "The generalizability of functions from one communicative event to another, the complexity of the grammatical forms appropriate to express the functions, the range of sociolinguistic variables crucially involved in a function, and the interrelationships among these sociolinguistic variables that must be known..." (p. 46).

Selection and Ordering of Materials

The salient characteristic of the functional/notional syllabus is not the selection of the material in and of itself, but the organization of the material and language teaching around the purposes of communication (functions) rather than linguistic forms (Wilkins, 1976; Harlow, 1978). However, the fact that the same meaning or the same purpose may be expressed through a variety of linguistic forms further complicates the issue (e.g., asking for permission could be expressed as follows: "May I use your phone?"; "I wonder if I might use your phone?; and indirectly, "I don't have any change"). Wilkins (1976) suggested that the selection of forms be based on the stylistic dimension of formality and politeness, the medium (speech or writing), and grammatical simplicity. Thus, the syllabus designer must make a predictive analysis of the content or purpose of communication; the syllabus, then, comprises a system or inventory of semantic or notional categories.

Selection of items can be determined in a variety of ways. Peck (1971) suggested methods such as introspection, observational research, polls and surveys given to users and learners of the language, and teachers' identification of concepts that students want to express

(pp. 363-68). Extensive inventories of functions and notions have been devised which might be useful in selecting course materials (Coste et al., 1976; van Ek and Alexander, 1977; Mumby, 1978; Wilkins, 1976; Guntermann and Phillips, 1982).

In setting goals and choosing materials to be taught, an effort should be made to specify levels of proficiency on the basis of the identification of communicative needs. Guntermann and Phillips (1982) suggested using the description of "survival," "waystage," and "threshold" levels of proficiency as a guide for teachers.

At the present, there appears to be few specifications for the sequencing of materials in a functional/notional syllabus. Guntermann and Phillips (1982) discussed two possible solutions to this problem. First, they suggested using a spiraling, or cyclical, arrangement of materials which would allow a function to be practiced in its simplest form early in the course and reintroduced in subsequent lessons in increasing depth and complexity. Second, they recommended the separation of essential material for speaking and writing (productive) purposes from the functions and forms that are needed for listening and readings (receptive skills).

Wilkins (1976) also recognized the problem of sequencing and how it could result in linguistic and thematically disconnected units. To offset this problem, he recommended using a story line to ensure thematical continuity, although he realized that such a move would not reconcile with the concept of a notional syllabus (p. 66).

Classroom Presentation

Syllabus design per se is usually concerned with content rather than methodology, although consistency between content and teaching approach is presupposed in most instances. As yet, the classroom presentation of functional/notional syllabi is largely undefined (McKay, 1980). Present syllabi include: role playing; simulations; problem solving activities; discovering sequences on locations; discovering missing information; learning to identify categories of communicative function in stories, plays, and dialogues; reading and listening to authentic language materials (e.g., newspaper articles, journals, broadcasts, impromtu dialogues); and assignments requiring use of the target language in the community. The underlying purpose behind all activities is to analyze the various intentions that they contain (McKay, 1980, p. 180).

Summary

Much of the literature on the functional/notional approach to curricular design presents it in a favorable light. It is true that many questions need to be answered (e.g., selection and sequencing of functions and materials; level at which it is most appropriate), however, it is also true that the functional/notional approach does address the issue of real communication in the classroom. Little empirical evidence is available on interactions between native and non-native speakers of a language, yet common sense tells us that language users mix and match words and structures according to what they want to say. Trabert (1979) posed a pivotol question: "What does the learner want or need to say?" She said "that's the question a functional analysis starts with, rather than beginning with the different ways to say it. The functional approach begins by defining the context in which the target language is used, and then specifies the grammatical patterns which normally appear in those contexts" (p. 5).

A consideration worth noting might be the feasibility of using this approach in the initial stages of language instruction. Stratton (1977) and Wilkins (1976) seemed to agree that the functional/notional syllabus is probably more effective and more feasible at high intermediate

and advanced levels of language instruction. Stratton (1977) also pointed out the value of this approach with adults and for FLSP or ESP courses rather than for children and more general language courses.

Further research is needed. The approach still needs to be "debugged". However, I do believe it has much to offer. For these reaons I have begun to adapt the functional/notional approach to suit my own teaching style and my concept of language teaching.

A Communicative Framework for Functional Language Practice: An Adaptation

Rationale

For centuries, knowledge of grammar and accuracy in speech--major products in communication--have held a central role in language learning and teaching. For years, grammarians, theoreticians, researchers, and language teachers have dealt with structure to the neglect of other elements of communicative behavior (e.g., social and psychological factors) which may be equally, if not more important in learner's proficiency. While the importance of a linguistic core should not be downplayed, I believe that language learning, like any other type of learning, will thrive best in a classroom where the limelight is placed on the learner and his/her

interaction with the teacher, the other learners, the course content, the instructional environment as well as his/her role within the larger societal context.

Viewed in this light, language learning and teaching become a process of insights and understanding, taking and giving, caring and sharing--a process of communicating one's notions through the medium of a foreign/second language using a communicative approach to functional practice. The criteria for success is contingent upon the learner's ability to cope (function) with the communicative demands of the immediate situation and his/her perceived success of how effectively he/she has expressed his needs and interests (notions).

Constituent Elements

The communicative framework for functional language practice that I am proposing rests upon the interaction of the following constituent elements: the learner; the teacher; the course syllabus; and the classroom. A brief description of these elements follows.

The Learner

The learner is a valuable individual who brings his whole person into language learning, seeking and/or reinforcing his/her identity through the medium of a foreign/second language. The TL provides a context for clarifying

and expressing his/her needs and interests. The learner is not an isolated, passive class member, but rather an interactive participant in the language learning process, engaged in real communication with the others and with himself/herself.

The Teacher

The teacher is a dedicated, competent professional who is genuinely interested in the development of the learner as a whole person, even if at the expense of the ideal, near-native language proficiency which may be presumably gained through a grammatical emphasis. The teacher perceives himself/herself as a learner and a facilitator of language learning, engaged in the process of real communication. One of his/her major aims is to assist the learner in understanding the latter's strategies and to build on them in order to maximize language learning. The teacher is also the syllabus designer, and, in Guntermann and Phillips' (1982) words, "It is the teacher's task to establish and maintain an atmosphere in which basic purposes (the learner functions) are fulfilled through the use of the target language (p. 17).

The Course Syllabus

Basically, the course syllabus I am proposing is in concordance with the functional/notional syllabus design

advocated by the Council of Europe. The content of the course is determined by the learner's communicative needs and interests. Teacher introspection, observation, continuous student feedback, an initial survey, and consensus of opinion during classwork serve as a guide to establish the goals and purposes of the learner.

The syllabus is conceived as a skeletal structure (a constructive schema) which allows the teacher to fill in the slots as the course progresses. The dynamic, interactive input from the learners serves as an invaluable guide in determining the methodology and content of the course.

When possible, a functional/notional-oriented textbook should be employed. However, if it is not available, any text can serve as a point of reference for the learner and to add continuity to the course content. The chapters from the text need not be the focal points of the syllabus. If the chapter were covered in two or three lessons, a cyclical approach would permit a surface and/or in-depth treatment of the material, adaptable to the learner's proficiency, immediacy of need, interests, and preferences. A combination of the functional/notional and grammatical syllabi is recommended.

The glue holding the content together is, in this framework, the communicative scope of the syllabus and the purposes of the learners.

The Classroom

A non-threatening, supportive student-centered classroom provides the ground for language learning; however, course materials which are relevant and meaningful to the students, are an absolute must. How are these materials (content) determined? The solution may lie in scrupulous planning, pedagogically sound methodology, carefully conceived principles, and willingness to change and adapt according to the cues and feedback from the students.

The teacher needs to have a variety of techniques and activities at his/her fingertips. These activities should be as realistic and authentic as possible. Suggestions include: role-playing, setting up "scenarios" or strategic behavior (e.g., Di Pietro's model), simulation, newspaper articles, problem-solving situations, information-seeking activities, planning strategies, and the Dialogue Journal. In my experience, I have found almost anything useful: the success of the given activity, however, depended on what I did with it and what the other learners were willing to do at the time.

Conclusion

Although empirical evidence on the functional/notional approach is lacking, there is some literature which

gives strong support to this syllabus design. The beauty of the approach, I think, lies in the learner-focused content. The learner's notions and functions are, supposedly, determined by his/her inner needs rather than being externally-imposed.

It would seem that there are myriad techniques and activities available in foreign/second language teaching. The raw material, the communicators, is undoubtedly available; the essence of language teaching centered around communication should not take long to follow if language teachers cater to the communicators' purposes.

The combination of the valid and adequate parts of both the grammatical and functional/notional approaches to syllabus design seems quite feasible. The effectiveness of such a combination rests on the ability to integrate a viable grammatical core within the learner's communicative notions and functions which remain the first priority in the proposed syllabus design.

Again, I ask the question: Has the language teacher found a balance among the function, content, and accuracy of the language taught? With a communicative approach to functional practice, a step in the right direction has been taken: the balance seems more feasible than ever before.

In the quest for communication, language teaching has come a long way after all.

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